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**Great Marsh Area of Critical Environmental Concern
is now the official name**

BOSTON - Massachusetts Secretary of Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles today announced a new name for the state-designated Parker River/Essex Bay Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC): the Great Marsh ACEC.

Known locally for years as the Great Marsh, the 25,500 acres of barrier beach, dunes, saltmarsh, and water bodies cover parts of several municipalities north of Cape Ann, including Essex, Gloucester, Ipswich, Newbury, and Rowley.

The push to officially rename the Parker River/Essex Bay ACEC came from groups such as the Massachusetts Bays Program Local Governance Committee, called Eight Towns and the Bay, and the Great Marsh Coalition, which includes nonprofit organizations as well as state, federal, and regional agencies, with support from the boards and commissions in those five communities.

"With this announcement, I also commend all the Great Marsh stewards who work tirelessly to protect, restore, and enhance the ACEC," Secretary Bowles said in a letter to the supporters. The area, he said, "includes nationally known recreational beaches, bird migration routes, and wildlife habitats. Large expanses of protected open space assist in protecting this unique area that is also economically important for fishing, shellfishing, tourism, and recreation."

ACECs are areas in Massachusetts that receive special recognition because of the quality, uniqueness, and significance of their natural and cultural resources. The areas are identified and nominated at the community level, and are reviewed and designated by the state's Secretary of Environmental Affairs. ACEC designation creates a framework for local and regional stewardship of critical resources and ecosystems.

The Legislature established the ACEC program in 1975, and the newly renamed Great Marsh ACEC was designated in 1979. There are now 28 ACECs in the Commonwealth, covering a total of nearly 241,000 acres in 73 communities statewide. The Department of Conservation

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and Recreation (DCR) administers the ACEC program on behalf of the Secretary. Within the Great Marsh ACEC, DCR owns 134 acres and has conservation restrictions on an additional 243 acres. DCR works closely with regional and statewide land protection partners to ensure that a significant portion of the ACEC is permanently protected.

"This name change signifies another step in the process of bringing the marsh to peoples' awareness," said Kathy Leahy, director of MassAudubon North Shore advocacy.

In a related event, the Great Marsh Symposium is scheduled for Saturday, March 10, at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge headquarters in Newburyport. At the event, hosted by the Great Marsh Coalition and Massachusetts Audubon, speakers will discuss various conservation, education, and stewardship efforts in the Great Marsh ACEC. The symposium will be 8:30 a.m - 2:30 p.m. and costs \$12. For details and registration information, call 978-462-9998.

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